

CRÉATIONS
ESTELLE
CLARETON

TENDRE



TEACHER'S GUIDE

Stretchy

for children ages 4 to 10

INTRODUCTION

Attendance at a dance performance requires a minimum of preparation with the students, so that they find the activity enriching and stimulating. That is why we have created this teacher's guide. It provides you with tools so that children will have a basic grasp of the themes of the show beforehand. It also includes proposals that will facilitate your research.

Before going to see the show we suggest that you talk to the children about what dance is, and the various ways of understanding a work of art. An interesting way would be to present the underlying themes of the piece (pages 3 to 5) and to embark on the proposed activity (page 7). Dance appreciation activities following the performance would be helpful in assessing their understanding and enjoyment of various aspects of the performance. It would be a good idea to start a discussion in the classroom about their perception of the themes and the aesthetics of *Stretchy*.

A family show that is endearing on many levels, *Stretchy* is performed by two colourful characters who find themselves, against their will, joined together by a big elastic band. Playing with a constraint that has suddenly turned their world upside down, they experience in this forced and somewhat absurd intimacy a surprising dependency on each other.

Captive to the context, they have no choice but to cope with this unsettling element, one that creates situations that are amusing but also touching. The blue-clad, ever mischievous duo invites children to a delightful experience that combines dance, theatre and clown

CREATIVE TEAM

Artistic director and choreographer : **ESTELLE CLARETON**
Dancers and artistic collaborators : **BRICE NOESER** and **KATIA PETROWICK**
Rehearsal director : **ANNIE GAGNON**
Music : **ÉRIC FORGET**
Lighting : **ÉRIC CHAMPOUX**
Set design, props and costumes : **ANNIE GÉLINAS**

Stretchy benefited from creative residencies at Agora de la danse (Montreal), Centennial Theatre (Lennoxville), Salle Pauline Julien (St. Geneviève) and Théâtre du Bic (Le Bic), and also received financial support from the Canada Council for the Arts.

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MAJOR THEMES OF *STRETCHY*

As Different as Night and Day

Stretchy tells the tale of the tribulations of two characters attached to one another by an elastic band, two individuals who are very different from one another. One needs his own space, and quickly feels the intense presence of the other as an intrusion. The other is very extroverted and establishes contact like a full-force collision! How can two such dissimilar people find common ground?

Two is better than one!

The two are stuck together by circumstance. One is quite enchanted by the situation, while the other does not appreciate it at all. They start to slowly draw closer, but then suddenly move away from each other, for it's hard to take the other person's feelings into account when you are forced into contact. They gradually realize that the elastic band is not as restrictive as they imagined, for it allows them to dance and to move in new ways, to explore movements neither could do on his own! Maybe two heads are better than one?

No Easy Task

The more extroverted character tries several different ways of approaching the other, but it's an uphill battle! They engage in role playing, which they find aggravating but amusing as they separate and come together once again. Is the key to agreement and understanding perhaps an open mind and a good imagination?

Unbridled Imagination

Everything becomes more ludicrous and fantastic as they realize that they have no choice but to accept that they are together and to make the best of it. They play with clichés about boys and girls, invent incredible stories with conviction and passion, and even plunge into a dreamscape to the strains of *Swan Lake* as they let their imaginations fly!

Permanent Separation?

Now pleased to be linked together, our two friends enjoy their situation more and more, like eager clowns or rock stars avid for applause. And then suddenly, they are no longer bound by the elastic band. Can they remain friends without being obliged to be together? Are invented games, clowning around and fantastic dreams still possible between two people, initially so far apart, who were together only because of a physical restraint? Is their friendship over?



THE CHOREOGRAPHER AND THE COMPANY : CRÉATIONS ESTELLE CLARETON (CEC)

Passionately interested in the language of the body, Estelle Clareton performed dance pieces imagined by other choreographers before deciding to create her own choreographies. Also an actress and a director, she creates worlds where a dialogue between theatre and dance is not only possible but complementary. An artistic consultant with the National Circus School in Montreal, she is greatly inspired by clowning, juggling and playful, acrobatic flights of fancy, and that circus influence is apparent in her stage works.

In order to provide a structure for her work, in 1999 she founded Créations Estelle Clareton. In short order the company made its mark with original, multifarious dance pieces imbued with humanity and purpose, and always presented with charm and humour. That same year her piece *Juliette* premiered in Montreal, and went on to tour France and England. In 2003 *Monsieur* was presented at the Agora de la danse and at Théâtre de Quat'Sous. As a movement consultant for theatre directors, she has worked at the TNM, Espace Libre and Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui.

In 2005 Estelle Clareton embarked on a succession of studies entitled *Furies*, an ambitious series of performances spread out over several years. The idea sprang from an urgent need to speak out, to defend and share her world view, how she relates to the other via the body. To date, *Furies* consists of nine dance pieces based on 24 artistic proposals that follow the Greek alphabet. Montréal Danse produced the first work in the series, *Furies, Alpha 1/24* (2005), a piece for 6 dancers that met with great acclaim and toured several countries. *S'envoler (Furies, Epsilon 5/24)*, one of her most ambitious works, is a piece for 12 dancers that since 2010 has toured Quebec, Canada, Mexico, France and Germany.

The 2013 recipient of the Paris studio prize (Quebec Council for the Arts), when in Paris she created *S'amouracher (Furies, Iota 9/24)*. In 2015 she created *Lumières et tremblements* for the graduating class of the École de Danse Contemporaine in Montreal. For both the company and its artistic director, *Stretchy* is an exciting new adventure, the company's very first piece for young audiences.



INTERVIEW WITH CHOREOGRAPHER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR ESTELLE CLARETON



Q: What are the themes underlying this dance piece?

First of all, I wanted to portray the difficulties that exist when we start a relationship with someone new, and I also wanted to discuss the stereotypes conveyed when we focus on the differences between boys and girls. I wanted to denounce, with humour and tenderness, the problems that arise when we have to interact with someone quite different from ourselves. I wanted to show the openness required in order to learn to love others, even if they are not like us or don't think like us. Bound together by an elastic band, the two characters initially do not like the enforced constraint of being together, but they slowly discover that it can be fun and that, in the end, they can't live without each other. Human relations are not always simple, even among children. They often have to deal with people without really knowing how to respond – it might be a little brother who is a bit of a pest, or a friend who at times can be very irritating.

Q: How did you create this piece?

We began by building puppets. When the dancers would manipulate them, the marionettes' arms and legs would go off in all directions, making for a very distinctive dance. Then when the dancers imitated the puppets, it was quite comical. Their bodies would move in crazy, illogical ways, they were very flexible. What we kept of that experiment was the movement of the puppets replicated in the dancers' bodies.

Q: How did the idea of an elastic band binding the dancers come about?

Since the dance was becoming elastic and fluid, the idea of linking them by means of a 20' rubber band was a natural outcome. The band suggests all sorts of situations, as it can put a brake on movement or amplify movement. The elastic can evoke all sorts of things: chewing gum, a swan's wings, a dress, etc. Indeed, the possibilities are endless..

Q: Spectators laugh often during the show. That's quite unusual for a dance piece, is it not?

Contemporary dance is often very serious and dramatic. I've always wanted to inject humour into dance. As a child I had a ballet teacher, a "dragon" who really frightened me. One day when my girlfriends and I were waiting for her in the studio, I started clowning around to make the other girls laugh, and I didn't hear her arrive. She yanked me by the hair and said, "Instead of playing the fool, you should step up to the barre and practise your grands pliés!" I think those two poles have always been a part of me; on the one hand the strictness and a desire for excellence that comes from ballet, and on the other fooling around among friends! Those two poles create a tension.

Q: What does laughter bring?

Laughter is essential in my life, and also in my work. I need to laugh in order to have the courage to create dance from an empty slate, and also to avoid being overcome by drama. I like to feature awkward characters in my pieces, people who are not necessarily strong or good-looking, strange and unconventional characters who might be seen as losers, who can't manage to live as simply as other people. When we laugh, we can plunge together into a frightening unknown. What makes me laugh is awkwardness and blunders, the feeling of being inadequate. Naturally I think of how a clown works, that special way of thinking that defies all logic.

Q: What are your inspirations?

I have many sources of inspiration, from the actor and director Charlie Chaplin to the choreographer Pina Bausch by way of classical ballet, which is my background in dance training. While my dance is accessible, nonetheless it is honed and polished down to the slightest detail. The rhythm, the stage presence of the dancers, how the music and the props are employed – all these aspects of my work have been carefully designed to demanding standards.

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

"Rhythm is an essential element of performances for children, and in this case it is an extremely well performed ballet set to an elastic band that stretches and contracts.

(...) A boy of about eight said to me, « Wow, I've never seen anything like it! » (...) They were beaming, they were touched. (...) It's presented with a lot of tenderness and also with a lot of intelligence."

Samedi et rien d'autre / Première chaîne Radio-Canada

"With a lovely poetic touch, Claretton evokes the range of a child's imagination, augmented by the musical score of Éric Forget, who combines classical, traditional and popular music. The dancers Brice Noeser and Katia Petrowick employ the disarticulated movements and exaggerated expressions of dolls or puppets. Their solid dance technique is quite apparent, as is their artistic sensitivity."

montheatre.qc.ca

"With the astute and impressive performances of Katia Petrowick and Brice Noeser, the discomfort, annoyance and disgust but also the joy, desire and euphoria that emerge from their interactions succeed in touching us. *Stretchy* offers an original experience and enriching reflections conveyed by incredibly precise choreography where every gesture has its place."

La Marelle

"Throughout the show, the protagonists Brice Noeser and Katia Petrowick tell us all sorts of things using very few words as the elastic band becomes a house, a flower, a microphone, a guitar, a star, etc. with endlessly original inventiveness that is imbued with charm and poetry."

Huffington Post

"(...) We laughed, we really laughed a lot during the 50-minute show. (...) There are regular changes in rhythm - the situations changes, the music changes - so that no one is bored for even a second. (...) It's great entertainment and a good way of introducing children to dance."

Le 15-18 / Première chaîne Radio-Canada

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Make Drawings of Stretchy:

Objective : After the performance of Stretchy, invite the children to make a drawing of what they liked about the show.

4 drawings. 4 stories :

Using a pencil, divide the sheet of paper into 4 parts.

IN SECTION A: draw the boy in *Stretchy*, using a colour that best defines him.

IN SECTION B: draw the girl, once again using a colour that portrays her best.

IN SECTION C: choose a colour that you think best represents the emotions you felt watching the show. Draw whatever moment in the show that you liked best.

IN SECTION D: mix together several colours you like, and draw what you liked or what you didn't like about the show.

Feedback :

Explain your masterpiece to us !

Why did you choose those particular colours and that particular drawing ?

How would you describe the boy and the girl ?

What did the music make you think of ?



MORE EXPLORATION

For ideas about explorations to undertake with your young charges, watch *La linea* by the Italian cartoonist Osvaldo Cavandoll. These short animated films (2 to 6 minutes) feature the silhouette of a man walking on an infinite line where he constantly encounters obstacles. These short films were a major inspiration for the visual work with the elastic band.

To view the art of clowning in all its splendour, check out the website Clownessence. It includes short exercises you can do with the children.

<http://www.clownessence.fr/livres-clown-danse-improvisations-danse.php>

And of course, there are always the ever-inspiring films of the immortal Charlie Chaplin !

A large, vibrant red abstract graphic with irregular, organic edges, resembling a splash or a stylized shape. It is centered on a white background. The text is printed in white on the upper portion of this red shape.

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